

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 452 703

FL 026 675

AUTHOR Schwinge, Diana
TITLE Standards, Exit Exams, and the Politicization of Bilingual Education: The Writing Exit Exam at Hostos College.
PUB DATE 2000-09-00
NOTE 20p.; For the complete collection of working papers, see FL 026 672.
PUB TYPE Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT Working Papers in Educational Linguistics; v16 n2 p43-61 Fall 2000
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Standards; Accountability; *Bilingual Education; Community Colleges; Elementary Secondary Education; *English (Second Language); *Graduation Requirements; *High Stakes Tests; *Politics of Education; Second Language Instruction; Second Language Learning; Test Validity; Two Year Colleges; *Writing Tests
IDENTIFIERS City University of New York Hostos Community Coll

ABSTRACT

Standards-based curricula are being created throughout the world, and exit exams are being implemented in order to make sure that students meet those standards. There is a real potential that these standards will help improve the achievement of students, but there is also a possibility that these exams will be implemented in a way that will be harmful to English language learners by denying them a chance for further education and threatening the existence of bilingual education. This paper examines a controversial language planning case, the enforcement of a writing exam requirement at Hostos Community College in New York City. Using Cooper's (1989) accounting framework, this policy analysis examines the covert agendas and implicit ideological agendas of actors in this language planning case and identifies points of leverage that can be used to influence similar cases in the future. (Contains 37 references.) (KFT)

ED 452 703

Standards, Exit Exams, and the Politicization of Bilingual Education: The Writing Exit Exam at Hostos College

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to
improve reproduction quality

- Points of view or opinions stated in this
document do not necessarily represent
official OERI position or policy.

Diana Schwinge

University of Pennsylvania

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS
BEEN GRANTED BY

C. Donnelly

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Standards based curriculums are being created throughout the world, and exit exams are being implemented in order to make sure that students meet those standards. There is a real potential that these standards will help to improve the achievement of students, but there is also a possibility that these exams will be implemented in a way that will be harmful to English language learners by denying them of a chance for further education and threatening the existence of bilingual education. This paper examines a controversial language planning case, the enforcement of a writing exam requirement at Hostos Community College in New York City. Using Cooper's (1989) accounting framework this policy analysis examines the covert agendas and implicit ideological agendas of actors in this language planning case and identifies points of leverage that can be used to influence similar cases in the future.

Introduction

Around the world there is a trend to control educational reform through the creation of standards based curriculum. These curriculum reforms lead to a system where standards are enforced with exit exams so schools' compliance with these standards and students' mastery of them can be measured. While appropriate standards and tests can improve an educational system, standards can also be misused. In addition, when standards are prescribed by government agencies, the creation of standards and tests becomes an inherently political and ideological act. Thus, the setting the creation of standards and exit exams are a new venue for debating educational issues.

Bilingual education is especially threatened by the new debate over standards and exit exams. First, it is possible that many students in bilingual education programs may fail these exams because exit exams are usually designed for native English speaking students. Thus, these exams are rarely designed to appropriately evaluate the skills of limited English proficient students. If bilingual education

FL 026675

students and other English language learners flunk school exit exams, these inappropriate tests can unfairly impede their graduation and further access to higher education. Second, while bilingual education has many supporters, it also has many enemies that actively look for issues and statistics they can use to attack bilingual education. Low scores on exit exams by students in bilingual programs can be used to embarrass supporters of bilingual education programs and to try to defeat bilingual education. Thus, it is crucial that supporters of bilingual education programs and language minority students understand the planning process and the political system through which standards and exit exams are created, and uncover ways to influence this process so that the way that standards are created and enforced is fair to language minority students in bilingual education programs.

This paper examines a controversial language planning case, the enforcement of a writing exam requirement at Hostos Community College in New York City. In 1997, a mass failure on a writing exam led to student protests, an initial change in graduation requirements, and then action by the Board of Trustees of CUNY (City University of New York) to reinstate the centralized CUNY writing exam as a graduation requirement. While Hostos Community College was not the only school where students had failed the exam, the press focused on the bilingual education program at the college as the reason why students were failing the test. Thus, the dispute over this exit exam led to negative assessments of bilingual education in the press, lawsuits, and the denial of degrees to some Hostos students.

Cooper's Framework

This analysis utilizes Cooper's (1989:98) accounting scheme for language planning to analyze how the writing exit exam at Hostos Community College was implemented in order to identify points of leverage that could be used to prevent problems in other similar cases where standards and exit exams are implemented. Cooper's accounting scheme for language planning is a descriptive framework that can be used to examine a language planning case by asking, "What actors attempt to influence what behaviors of which people for what ends under what conditions by what means through what decision-making process with what effect?" (Cooper 1989:98). In his summary of the accounting scheme of language planning Cooper (1989:97) states that one purpose of description is to identify variables that influence language planning and points of leverage that can be used to change those variables. Bauer (1968, cited in Cooper 1989:97) defines points of leverage as "a person, institution, issue or subsystem... that has the capacity to effect a substantial influence on the output of the system" (Bauer 1968: 21). Thus, the description of this case will be used to determine how the people, institutions, and issues involved in planning standards and exit exams can be influenced and changed so that the outcome of standards based reform movements does not harm language minority students or bilingual education programs.

The structure of this framework has been criticized because its focus on de-

scription has led people to believe that Cooper presumes this type of analysis will lead to an objective account. For example, Moore (1996) wrote that "Cooper's (1989) answer suggests endless description, pseudoscientific methods, and grand theory, all in the name of objectivity" (Moore 1996: 485). However, the purpose of this paper is not to use the framework to create an objective description, suggest a new method of language planning, or propose any grand theories. Instead, the purpose in this framework is closer to that expressed by Fanselow's (1990) review of Cooper's book. "One of the purposes of his [Cooper's] book is to point out for all of us instances of language planning and their possible consequences so that we can study our own predicaments and compare our proposed policies with those others have used" (Fanselow 1991: 650). It is recognized that the description of this language planning case will not be objective, scientific, or include every detail about the case that is being analyzed. Instead, it is acknowledged that all descriptions, including this one, are influenced by the ideologies of their author. Overall, the purpose of the description is to analyze this language planning case in order to identify specific points of leverage that can be used to impact the outcome of similar language planning cases in the future, and to make explicit the assumptions that are made by those who create standards and exit exams.

A Language Planning Case:

The Writing Exit Exam at Hostos Community College

Structural Conditions

In order to understand this case of language planning, it is first necessary to understand the structural conditions and the environment in which Hostos Community College exists. Cooper (1989) defines structural factors as the "...relatively unchanging features of a society's political, economic, social, demographic, and ecological structures" (Cooper 1989: 93). Hostos Community College is located in the South Bronx, New York City. The Bronx as a whole is one of the poorest counties in the United States. The Bronx has a population of 1.2 million people of whom 23% receive public assistance and many live below the poverty line. In addition, 41.5% of adults living in the Bronx don't have a high school diploma, and only 37.3% of Bronx children under the age of ten live with both their parents ("Bronx Page" 1999: web page). Violence and poor health care also create low life expectancies. This concentration of poverty is related to the racial segregation of New York City. As a result of this segregation, the residents of the South Bronx are almost entirely from ethnic minority groups. The largest ethnic group are Puerto Ricans (36.7%), while there are also large numbers of African Americans (33.5%), Dominicans (11.8%), and other Hispanics (9.0%) ("Bronx Page" 1999: web page). In the midst of this concentration of poverty, Hostos Community College stands out as a special and very important community institution.

Hostos Community College was created as a result of the activism of the Puerto Rican community in the South Bronx. It opened to its first class

of students in 1970 in a former tire factory (Saltonstall 1997:43). Hostos was the first bilingual higher education institution in the continental United States, and is the only institution of higher education on the mainland to be named after a Puerto Rican ("Hostos Community College" 1999: web page). While it has served as a resource for thousands of students, its existence has sometimes been threatened. It was almost forced to merge with another college in 1976, and the state senate was forced to pass a special act, the Landes Higher Education Act, to protect its existence ("Hostos Community College" 1999: web page). Hostos has recently improved its facilities with \$120 million dollars of new construction, including two theaters, an art gallery, and new computer and recreation facilities (Gonzalez 1997: 22). Hostos College also provides a variety of important services for the South Bronx including providing legal assistance to women and those who are HIV positive, environmental programs for the residents of the South Bronx, and special training in math and science for high school students (Luhrs 1996: 7). Thus, Hostos Community College is a special resource for the residents of the South Bronx, and one that they have fought hard to preserve when it has been endangered by political or social forces.

Targets and Actors

In addition to the structural factors, it is necessary to be aware of the people who were involved or affected by this language planning controversy. Cooper (1989:88) describes the targets of a language policy as those whose behavior and lives the policy affects. There are 4,200 students at Hostos (Bowles 1998: A28). Of these students, 80% are Hispanic, 80% women, and 40% are on welfare (Gonzalez 1997: 22).

Cooper (1989: 88) defines the actors in a language planning case as those who create or influence the creation of the language policy. One type of actors are authorities; those who actually have the power to create and enforce policies. Hostos College is part of the CUNY (City University of New York) system. In this case, the appointed Board of Trustees for CUNY are the authorities who determine the graduation requirements from the various colleges that comprise CUNY. The Board of Trustees of CUNY has 17 members. Of these 17 members, ten are appointed by the governor, five are appointed by the mayor, one is a student, and one faculty member is a non-voting member (Healy & Schmidt 1998: A21). The governor and mayor choose people to serve on the board who they believe will further their own desires for the CUNY system. In 1996 the mayor and the governor jointly announced that those goals were to cut the cost of CUNY, raise standards in the system, and depoliticize the curriculum ("Bruno, Stop Stalling" 1996: 20). Those chosen for the trustees also frequently have a close connection to the politicians who appoint them. For example, of four new members who the mayor appointed in 1996, three held jobs in the mayor's administration (Healy & Schmidt 1998: A21). Thus, the trustees are chosen because they believe in a certain set of goals and have a loyalty that may influence their votes on certain issues. The only legal

check on the power of the Trustees are the state courts. If New York citizens want to challenge the decisions of the Board of Trustees, they can file a lawsuit in the State Supreme Court. The judgment of this court can then be appealed to the State Appeals Court.

However, the Board of Trustees does not make its decisions in isolation. The administration and faculty of CUNY, elected officials, the press, and think tanks also attempt to influence the members of the Board of Trustees. The administrators and faculty of CUNY include the chief administrator of the CUNY system (the University Chancellor), the presidents of each of the various colleges that comprise CUNY, and the Council of Faculty Governance Leaders. Also, various additional elected officials and politicians can have an influence on the policies that are set for CUNY. These include New York City assemblymen, borough presidents, state senators, and mayoral candidates. Another influential group is the press. The content of articles and editorials can influence public opinion. The important papers in influencing this case were *The New York Times*, the *Daily News*, *Newsday*, and the Spanish language newspaper, *El Diario*. In addition to groups that primarily influence public opinion, there are also groups that influence the politicians and the Board of regents directly through reports and presentations. An example of this is two conservative think tanks, the Manhattan Institute and the Empire Foundation for Policy Research. Thus, there are many influential groups who can apply pressure on decisions, and influence the outcome of the Board of Trustees.

Behaviors

Frohock (1979, cited in Cooper 1989:90) states that in the field of language planning behaviors should be defined as what the actors want to accomplish and how they go about making sure that this is achieved. In this case, the behavior that the decision-makers wanted to enforce was having students at Hostos Community College demonstrate language and writing proficiency by passing the CUNY exit exam, and this was to be achieved through the ESL and English instruction at Hostos. The CUNY writing exam was first required in the 1970's ("Hostos Web Site" 1997: 40). The format of the exam is a persuasive essay that the students answer from a short prompt. The essays are graded by two professors at the English department of the school, and if they don't agree on the score, a third professor determines the score. The ideas of the essay can be "somewhat rudimentary or incomplete," the vocabulary can be "oversimplified," and the spelling, grammar, and punctuation must only be "reasonably accurate" (Buettner 1997: 7). Students at Hostos are given extensive ESL and English instruction in order to learn English better and prepare for the exam. ESL students take a course that meets ten-and-a-half hours a week. Students also take English composition before graduation ("Hostos Community College" 1999: Web site). In addition, Hostos sometimes offers intensive courses to help the students pass the exam (Gonzalez 1997: 8).

Informational Conditions

Cooper (1989) suggest that since behaviors are inherently political and ideological it is essential to examine the information conditions in language planning cases. In the case of the Hostos College exit exam it can be asked: What is assumed by the people who create and mandate this test, and are those assumptions supported by current theories of second language acquisition and language learning?

The assumption of the Board of Trustees and the people who have created the CUNY writing exam appears to be that English proficiency is a unitary construct. Thus, if students can achieve a passing score on specific reading and writing exams then they are English proficient, and if they fail then they are not proficient in English. However, Ward (1998: 65) challenges the idea that English proficiency is a unitary construct that can be determined by one writing exam. Instead, he assumes that acquiring English proficiency is a process, and students can be proficient enough in English to master many tasks while being unable to do others.

There are two aspects of the CUNY writing test that make it inappropriate to use as an overall measure of English proficiency. First, the construct of the CUNY writing exam uses impromptu writing with a time limit to measure English proficiency. This is the test format that is most difficult for English language learners, and is not a task that they will be frequently called upon to do in their classes or their future jobs. In most real-life writing situations, students will have enough time to revise while doing writing tasks, the opportunity to consult dictionaries and other reference guides to English grammar, and perhaps even have their writing checked by a native speaker.

Second, those who are familiar with the exam say that most students who fail the exam do so because their writing is judged to have excessive mistakes in spelling or grammar, especially the use of articles and prepositions (Biederman 1997: 19). Studies in second language acquisition have shown that while some grammatical constructions are acquired quickly by English language learners, others are more difficult and may take many years to acquire. Since articles and prepositions are difficult items to acquire in the English language, many students who are generally proficient in English may continue to make some types of mistakes for years. These grammar mistakes, however, do not necessarily imply a lack of overall English language proficiency. Having an imperfect mastery of English grammar does not mean that students can not be successful learners or workers in their second language. The timed nature of this exam and its focus on grammatical accuracy means that it may be an inappropriate way to measure the English proficiency of limited English proficient students.

The Decision-Making Process, Means, and Effects

Now that the structural conditions in which Hostos Community College operates, the people involved in the case, the CUNY writing exam, and the assumption of the exam creators have been reviewed, it is possible to examine the details of the case of the implementation of the exit exam at the college. The CUNY writing test

was first established as a graduation requirement in 1978. By the middle of the 1980's, the test was also being used as a placement exam, and students who did not pass the writing exam were forced to stay in remedial English classes until they passed (Arenson 1997: 1A).

However, by the 1990's, the validity and the reliability of the test were challenged. For example, in 1990 a CUNY professor, Dr. Otheguy, wrote a study "The Condition of Latinos in the City University of New York" which criticized the CUNY writing test saying, "[the test] lacks systematic supporting validation research, [and] relies on single measures against the advice of authorities in the area of testing" (Rodriguez 1997: 10). This report was followed by another report in 1992 and a faculty committee recommendation in 1995 which suggested that the writing test should not be the only criterion used to judge whether students can leave remedial English classes. In 1996 yet another faculty report recommended that a new test be developed. While the Board of Trustees never took a vote on changing the writing test, many of the colleges in the CUNY system followed the recommendations in the reports and developed their own exit criteria that did not include the CUNY writing test (Arenson 1997: 1A).

At the same time that faculty committees were recommending that the writing test be modified, students at Hostos community college were also complaining about the test. In 1995, only 20% of Hostos students who took the CUNY writing test passed it. The students who did not pass the test were forced to take the same five-credit course year after year. Students who were unhappy about being unable to pass the test met with Hostos administrators several times. Trying to improve the situation, Hostos created its own writing test. However, when Hostos used its own test in 1996, only 12.8% of the students taking the test passed. During the winter intersession in 1997 Hostos gave intensive workshops for the students who still needed to pass the writing assessment test. Eight hundred students went to class for twenty hours a week during their break, and 60% of them passed the test. In spring of 1997, Hostos again used its own exam. All the students who took the test failed. After the failures, the students decided to boycott the exams (Gonzalez 1997: 8). When the students protested, administrators at Hostos dropped the test as a graduation requirement (Buettner 1997: 6).

The fact that the writing test had been dropped as a graduation requirement was not widely known in New York City until May 21, 1997 when the Daily News published an article stating that Hostos had changed its graduation policy. The next day, the chief administrator of the CUNY system, Chancellor Reynolds, ruled that all future students must pass the CUNY writing test before graduating. (Buettner 1997: 6) To make sure that the Chancellor's ruling was carried out, on May 27, 1997, at the CUNY Trustees Meeting, Trustee Badillo introduced a resolution that forced the students to pass the CUNY writing test or be denied graduation. At the meeting, Chancellor Reynolds told the trustees that Hostos was the only college that was not requiring the test for graduation. None of the other community college presidents clarified that they also did not require the test (Buettner 1997:6). The CUNY Trustees rebuked Hostos for "low-

ering the standards." Then, the CUNY trustees unanimously voted to have the CUNY writing test be a condition for graduation at all colleges (Buettner 1997:6)

Negative press coverage of Hostos' bilingual program continued as the students struggled to pass the CUNY writing test before their graduation which was just a few days away. On May 30 and 31, 1997, the students came to Hostos to take the test. However, only 13 out of 104 students who took the English writing test as a new graduation requirement passed. Thirty-six additional students didn't show up to take the test. There were varying accounts expressed in the press about the reason why the students were failing the exam. One of the CUNY trustees, Badillo, said that the low scores show that the students "just haven't mastered the English language... This is pathetic. It shows we have to review the whole operation there" (Buettner 1997:7). However, Yamille Mendez, Hostos' student government president, said that the students failed because the exam was given on short notice. Mendez believed that "The students had no time to study, to practice" (Buettner 1997:7).

Hostos Community College decided to allow all the students who had flunked the CUNY writing test but had finished all of the other requirements for graduation to attend the commencement ceremonies on June 1, 1997. During the commencement the students and the invited speakers conducted what one editorialist for the Daily News reported was a "four-hour political rally that passed for graduation exercise" ("Hot air at Hostos" 1997: 30). Democratic Assemblyman Ramirez said that "You and I are not supposed to speak English, but I have never heard the national anthem sound so pretty as when you sang it today" (Buettner 1997: 8). Ramirez also criticized those who issued and supported the order to make the students take the last minute test. He said that Herman Badillo was "someone who is one of us and forgot where he came from." At the end of his speech Ramirez shouted: "You tell them to hang their heads in shame. You tell them you are not afraid of tests. You are not afraid of standards just double standards" (Buettner 1997: 8). He reaffirmed the importance of bilingual education by saying "As we study English, we must honor our Spanish, too" ("Hot air at Hostos" 1997: 30). Bronx Borough President Ferrer supported Ramirez's comments by saying that the standards issue was just "political ping pong" ("Hot air at Hostos" 1997: 30). The press reported on the graduation exercise, and again publicly denounced bilingual education for creating radical students who could not meet academic standards.

On June 4, 1997, after the bilingual education program at Hostos had been attacked in the press for days, CUNY officials finally revealed that other community colleges had also not required the CUNY test. Yamille Mendez, the president of the Hostos Student Government, said that the attacks on Hostos were unfair. "I would argue that if they're going to pull this on Hostos they have to pull it on everybody" (Buettner 1997:22). In response, Paolucci, the chairwoman of the CUNY board of trustees, said that the trustees would make community colleges withhold the diplomas of all students who had not met the English requirement. On June 4, the Chancellor's office estimated that 200 graduating students at three

colleges (Bronx Community College, Borough of Manhattan Community College and La Guardia Community College) would be affected.

The next day, CUNY officials revealed that 541 students had not passed the English Proficiency Test. These students included 127 students at Hostos Community College, and 414 students at four other community colleges (Queensborough, Borough of Manhattan, La Guardia, and Bronx Community College). Only Kingsborough Community College was requiring the test for graduation. The community colleges were told by the CUNY administration to offer free summer English courses for these students to prepare them to take the test. State Senator Stavisky introduced a bill in the state legislature that would give these students a two-year grace period to pass the test. According to the bill, they would get provisional diplomas for two years or until they passed the test. The State Senator said, "I have respect for standards, but there has to be a more humane way of dealing with these students" ("CUNY says" 1997: B7).

The press reported on June 6, 1997 that the three community college presidents whose students hadn't passed the CUNY writing test were present at the May 27th meeting when Chancellor Ann Reynolds told trustees that Hostos was the only campus not requiring the test. Although they had known the Chancellor's information about the use of the test was wrong, they didn't say anything at the meeting. Badillo told the press that the silence of the presidents was "inexcusable. To sit there and let the trustees pass a resolution concerning something where the information is incorrect is unforgivable" (Buettner 1997:6). Later that week, the Council of Faculty Governance Leaders passed a resolution that expressed regret "about the public savaging of Hostos." The trustees did not respond to the resolution (Buettner 1997:6). While the press and opponents of bilingual education had blamed the test failures on bilingual education daily for almost two weeks, there were no articles in the press that attempted to correct the public's perception that bilingual education had caused the failures.

The students decided that the CUNY Board of Trustees had created the writing test requirement unfairly, and on June 23, 1997 five Hostos students filed a lawsuit to have the CUNY test rescinded as a requirement for graduation from community college ("Hostos Victory" 1997: 32). At the court hearing, Chancellor Reynolds stated that Hostos Community College had broken the CUNY rules by setting up its own proficiency test without notifying the Chancellor's office. The lawyers for the Hostos students used course catalogs and reports to attempt to prove that the college had frequently made changes in the graduation requirements without any formal approval. Hostos President Santiago testified that Hostos was within its rights to change its examination procedures without approval from the trustees (Arenson 1997: B4). Less than a month later, Judge Thompson ruled that the students could get their diplomas without passing the writing test. Thompson said that Badillo's resolution on May 27th "was not based on informed, lucid and cogent deliberative processes." He further maintained that graduation criteria "should not be retroactively imposed in haste...Such conduct by educators is arbi-

trary and capricious, and in the present case must be held to be undertaken in bad faith" (Buettner 1997:6). The lawyers for the city filed an appeal so that the students could not get their diplomas until the Appellate Division ruled on the case (Buettner 1997:6). Unfortunately, during the process of the appeal, all the paperwork for the case was lost, so the appeal was delayed (Rodriguez 1997:10).

While the initial court ruling was in favor of the Hostos students, the story was far from over as articles that negatively presented bilingual education continued to be published. In September of 1997 it was reported that the students at Hostos did poorly in the remedial summer English courses that were designed to help them pass the writing test. 95% of the Hostos students who took the classes had failed the writing test again. These failures led to attacks on CUNY officials, and on September 15, 1997 Ann Reynolds resigned as chancellor after she was heavily attacked by the trustees (Buettner 1997:28). At the meeting of the CUNY Board of Trustees, Badillo attacked the members of the Hostos administration for low graduation rates, for scheduling too many classes in Spanish, and for the low summer pass rate on the writing exam. He said that Hostos President Santiago was doing a poor job.

In response to Badillo's complaints, Hostos students and other members of the public began to publicly attack Badillo. First, seventy-five Hostos students went and protested outside CUNY headquarters, screaming, "Hey, hey, ho, ho, Badillo has to go" (Buettner 1997: 4). Then, the dispute formally became an issue in the mayoral campaign on October 16, 1997 when Ruth Messinger, a Democratic mayoral candidate, attacked Badillo for his work as a trustee. Since Badillo was supported by Mayor Giuliani, this was in effect an attack on the Republican mayor. She said that Badillo and others in the CUNY debate, "might best be described as having climbed up the ladder themselves, and when they got to the top, turned around and pulled the ladder up after them" (Finnegan & Siegel 1997:7). Giuliani did not issue a response, but the press again printed negative articles about bilingual education at Hostos.

The most negative press about bilingual education was printed in unsigned editorials in the Daily News. Upset about the continuing editorials and the threat to Hostos, on October 21, 1997 about 30 students of Hostos protested in front of the Daily News building. No representatives of the Daily News would come down to talk to the students. The students protested because they felt that the editorials of the Daily News unfairly claimed that Hostos students graduated without knowing English and without meeting the standards of the CUNY system. The secretary of the Student Senate said,

"Los editoriales de este diario son racistas y discriminan contra los estudiantes minoritarios del sistema universitario de esta ciudad y contra los estudiantes de Hostos... El problema es que los métodos pedagógicos no se adaptan a las necesidades de los estudiantes bilingües y por eso debemos

reformularlos. Pero el Daily News ha dicho que nosotros no queremos aprender...y eso es mentira" ("The editorials of this newspaper are racist and discriminate against minority students in the university system, in the city, and against students at Hostos...The problem is that teaching methods are not adapted to the needs of bilingual students and thus they need to be reformed. But the Daily News has said that we don't want to learn... and that is a lie") (Castano 1997: 2).

This demonstration was only reported in the Spanish language press, and the students' ideas about bilingual education were not reported by any of the English language papers.

Throughout the fall, the negative reports about Hostos and its bilingual education system continued. The pressure built on Santiago, who had been the president of Hostos for eleven years, to resign. Santiago finally agreed to resign because she thought it was necessary to save Hostos College. She was quoted as saying, "I just want to save the mission of Hostos as a bilingual school for the most needy" (Gonzalez 1997:22). Newsday reported that she resigned "under fire because of the failure of a substantial number of students to pass an English proficiency test" (Bowles 1998: A28).

With some of the opponents of the CUNY writing test forced from office, the Board of Trustees was able to approve a controversial plan to eliminate remedial education programs at CUNY's four-year schools and institute a new exit exam for community college graduates. The new system was first proposed by Mayor Giuliani and was backed by Governor Pataki. On May 26, 1998 the Board of Trustees approved a measure that students who could not pass the CUNY writing test could not enter the four-year schools. The Board of Trustees did make an exemption in the plan for students educated in foreign high schools who could show that they needed no remedial work even though they failed the CUNY writing exam (Arenson 1998: A1). CUNY students and their supporters came to protest at the meeting. The 75 demonstrators disrupted the meeting to the extent that Paolucci had to have the room cleared before a vote could be taken on the measure. Twenty people were arrested on charges of disorderly conduct and criminal trespassing including Democratic Assemblyman Sullivan who was the chairman of the Assembly Higher Education Committee (Bowles & Janison 1998: A6).

Finally on December 11, 1998 the state appeals court gave a unanimous ruling that students from CUNY must pass the writing test before they receive a diploma ("CUNY reform" 1998: 70). The students at Hostos had lost their battle to get their diplomas and have appropriate requirements set for a community college degree. Two years after the students intended date of graduation, there were seventy-five Hostos College students who had planned to graduate in Spring of 1997 who still had not received their diplomas (Gonzalez 1999: 6).

The imposition of the writing test as a requirement to graduate from Hostos

College also has had lasting effects on the enrollment and graduation rates of the school. In 1996 before the writing test controversy, 5,500 students were enrolled at Hostos College, but by the fall of 1999 the enrollment was only 3,200 students. While a part of this drop in enrollment may be the result of 600 students who were forced to drop out of school when the city decided that work study on the campuses of city colleges would stop counting as hours of employment for the workfare program, part of the drop has also been blamed on the discouragement that some students felt at being unable to pass the writing test (Sugarman 1999: 3). While the constant coverage of the problems at Hostos College receded from the newspapers, the effects of the writing test controversy still hang over Hostos College.

Overt and Covert Ends

From the responses that emerged from the enforcement of the writing exam, it is possible to see that this is not just a case of educational concern about low test scores. Thus, it is important to analyze what issues beside the writing test were being debated through the controversy about the writing test, and what overt and covert agendas were being furthered through the debate. These issues include: the value of a bilingual education, the effectiveness of bilingual education at Hostos Community College, the political futures of some elected officials, the downsizing of CUNY due to budget cutbacks, the power minorities were gaining in the political system, and educational genocide.

It is possible that the covert end of some actors in this case was to attack and try to end bilingual education in higher education in New York. They used the low passing rate of Hostos students on the writing test to call into question the effectiveness of using the model of bilingual education at Hostos, and the effectiveness of bilingual education in general. Since students could not pass the writing test, a report from a conservative think tank assumed that "[Hostos] does not appear to facilitate students' progress toward the stated goal of mastering English" (Saltonstall 1997: 43). Beliefs about the ineffectiveness of language instruction at Hostos spread to encompass the entire work of the college. As Badillo said to the press, "Bilingual education has been a complete failure [at Hostos]. It's time to rethink the school's mission" ("In any language" 1997:58). Others questioned the utility of the Spanish portion of the bilingual education. As the outgoing head of the English department at Hostos, Villanueva, was quoted as saying, "We have created what I call an imaginary community. But where is the bilingual society where these students will find a job?" (Saltonstall 1997:43). These comments were repeated by the press, especially in editorials in the Daily News. For example, one editorial commented about whether Hostos students will be able to use their skills in Spanish.

"Really? Where? Mexico? Paraguay? Certainly not here, unless the ultimate 'career goal' is to work in a bodega.

Hostos isn't bilingual; it's monolingual, and the lingual (sic) is Spanish. A noble tongue, Spanish. But it is not the language of business and commerce in New York...The Hostos results raise serious questions about whether the place should exist at all" ("Hostos Web Site" 1997: 40).

Thus, the issue of whether or not Hostos students could pass one specific writing test led to comments about whether bilingual education was effective, whether Hostos should exist at all, and whether bilingual education was useful in American society.

It also appears that the debate over the writing test continued partly because the debate served the personal interests of some politicians. It was stated often in the case that the debate over exit exams at Hostos was based more on political consideration than what was educationally sound. For example, Santiago, the President of Hostos, remarked to the media, "Los argumentos en contra de los programas de educación bilingüe son políticos, no pedagógicos." (The arguments against bilingual education programs are political, not pedagogical) (Arce 1995: 26). It is possible that politicians such as Badillo were being tough on standards to establish their identities as conservative politicians. Prior to 1998, Badillo was a Democratic politician who had been the first Puerto Rican Bronx borough president and a member of the U.S. House of Representatives. However, several of his attempts to become the Democratic candidate for mayor had been frustrated by other minority candidates. Thus, on July 2, 1998, Badillo switched his political allegiance to the Republican Party. He also declared that he was planning a fourth run for mayor, this time as a Republican. When Badillo was asked about running for mayor he said, "I'm not going to be coy. It's certainly possible and it certainly makes sense" (Borrero 1998: 3). In preparation for his run for mayor, it is possible that he used his position on the Vice President of the Board of Trustees as CUNY to establish a more conservative image for himself. Instead of taking the liberal stance of supporting bilingual education, he adopted the conservative stance and attacked it. Also, instead of adopting the liberal political position of supporting open admissions and educational opportunities for recent immigrants, he endorsed the more conservative positions of creating standards in order to reduce admissions and limit access to higher education. Thus, it is possible that some of the rhetoric surrounding this language planning case was motivated by the political ambitions of some of the actors.

It was also suggested that the debate over the CUNY writing test was motivated by a desire to downsize the university and spend less money on the CUNY system. As one Hostos professor, Dr. Torres-Saillant, said, "The real issue at CUNY is the downsizing of the university" (Rodriguez 1997: 10). This is supported by critics' views of Mr. Carroll who runs the conservative think-tank the Empire Foundation for Policy Research. They say, "To his critics, Mr. Carroll's push for 'higher standards'—which he describes as

higher graduation rates, stronger general-education requirements, and less remediation, among other things—is a Republican subterfuge to deny access to students” (Healy 1998: A23). The drop in enrollment at Hostos College that has occurred since that writing test was imposed as an exit requirement provides further evidence that one of the implicit goals of requiring the writing test was to deny some students access to higher education.

In addition, one of the three goals of the newly appointed members of the CUNY Board of Trustees was to save money. The most effective way to save money at the university is to enroll fewer students. However, since there are many people in the city of New York who want to continue their education, it is hard to deny them entrance outright. By setting standards, such as the CUNY writing exam, that keep many from entering CUNY and earning a degree, the number of students in the CUNY schools can be reduced. Also, if a campus of CUNY can be closed, even more money can be saved. By attacking the mission of Hostos, political forces can give a reason why the school should be closed. Thus, the debate over standards may be more a debate over whether money should be spent to educate students rather than a debate over whether students can pass a writing test.

It is also possible that another covert end in this language planning case was to contain and reduce the power that minorities and those of lower socio-economic class. Since the students at Hostos and their supporters were willing to protest against the unfairness of the test, some made an issue of how the city’s political system was being challenged. As Heather MacDonald wrote in a report from the conservative think tank The Manhattan Institute, on the enforcement of the writing test:

“[CUNY] Once a loose aggregate of elite colleges for the ambitious poor, it is now a bloated bureaucracy that jettisoned academic standards in the face of a flood of ill-prepared students. CUNY all but perfected the dismaying 1960s spectacle of educated adults cowering before know-nothing adolescents and outside agitators” (Harden 1998: A3).

It is interesting that conservatives would comment that the students were “adolescents” since most Hostos students are older than that, and also to mention “outside agitators” since their supporters were mostly New York City residents who are faculty at CUNY or long-standing politicians. This quote is in essence a comparison between the “educated” faculty and Board of Trustees of CUNY and the “know-nothing” students. Since the comparison is referring back to the 1960’s when the Puerto Rican community was first established as a political force in the city, it is possible that what is feared is not really a public policy based on a lack of knowledge, but rather protests leading to more political and social power for minorities. Thus, one issue being debated through the standards movement is who should have control over the educational system: minority residents in New York or the elites of the Board of Trustees.

It is also possible that some actors have a covert agenda to use standards to deprive minority students of future economic power. In this view, the writing test requirement can be seen as a purposeful racist action to deny minority students an education, and thus deprive them of a basic resource that they need to survive in American society. For example, Ronald McGuire, the attorney who represented the students in their lawsuit said,

"The real issue at Hostos has little to do with tests. The issue is that CUNY is at war with its students... This is not about tests or budget cutbacks. It's about educational genocide. This is the first time the trustees have been appointed by a Republican governor and mayor, and to them, Black and Latino students are expendable. When European immigrants were in the majority, CUNY went out of its way to meet their needs" (Rodriguez 1997: 10).

The writing test requirement could be seen as an action that was purposefully done to deprive minority students of a chance for an education, and to perpetrate educational genocide. Thus, overall, the debate over the CUNY writing test was used to bring up many other issues, and possibly advance the covert agendas of several groups.

Points of Leverage

Given the gravity of what is at stake in cases of the implementation of standards based curriculum and exit exams, it is important to use this analysis to determine some points of leverage that those who support bilingual education and language minority students can use. These points of leverage are clearly related to the conditions of society and the ends that the actors in the system are pursuing.

First, the analysis of the informational conditions of this case shows that one possible point of leverage may be to educate influentials in the system about second language acquisition and ESL writers. For example, if the English faculty at the CUNY community colleges learned more about second language acquisition and second language writing, they might grade the exams differently. Perhaps the tests could also be graded by ESL teachers at the community college, since these faculty members have a special understanding of how ESL students compose essays. Also, the politicians and members of the Board of Trustees of CUNY need to be educated about the exit test, so they know what type of test is appropriate to mandate for second language learners.

If it is true that some actors are using exit exams as a way to challenge bilingual education, then one point of leverage may be to show that limited English proficient students who are not in bilingual programs are also having difficulties with exit exams. In the case of Hostos, it took many days before it was shown

that failing the exit exam was a problem across the CUNY system and not just a problem in a bilingual institution. Also, actors in the system who support bilingual education should try to keep the focus of the debate on the appropriateness of the construct of the test, not on the effectiveness of the educational method used to instruct students. In other words, it is not that the students, teachers, or institutions are at fault, but rather that the test doesn't measure English proficiency.

Since it seems that some actors have the end goal of reducing educational opportunities for minority students in order to save money it would help to expose this covert end explicitly in the media. Since they support their goals through reports produced by conservative think tanks, there is a need for liberal think tanks or academics to produce reports that reveal the flaws in the research against bilingual education and exit exams that don't really measure English proficiency. These reports could be released to the media so that they would have a source of information to use to contradict the reports from conservative think tanks in their articles.

In addition, it is possible that what is really being debated through standards is the balance of political and economic power in society. Thus, one point of leverage is for the users and supporters of bilingual education to gain more political power. It would help if groups such as students and faculty who disagreed with the writing exit exams were more proactive. In New York, standards are set by boards that are appointed by elected officials. Thus, one possible way of affecting standards and reducing the threats to bilingual education is to elect politicians who support bilingual education and the rights of minorities. An additional point of leverage is to protest. However, these protests require that citizens be better informed about how language policy decisions like the exit exam at CUNY effect the people in their community. It is especially important for more articles about exit exams and their effects to appear in the Spanish language press.

Also, another point of leverage is for the targets and influentials to use the power that they do have most effectively. In the CUNY case, the students and faculty got stuck in a cycle of power sequencing with the Board of Trustees. Cooper gives a clear definition of Frey's (1980, cited in Cooper 1989: 84) concept of power sequencing when he says, "In power sequencing, A's attempt to influence B may be met by B's refusal to comply or by B's partial compliance or by some kind of evasion on B's part. Then A must try again, an attempt which is followed by another response, and so on, until B complies or until A modifies the original goal or gives up on it" (Cooper 1989: 84). In this case, the people who opposed the CUNY writing exit exam reacted to the actions of the Board of Trustees, rather than acting proactively. For example, they initially protested only after failing the exam, they filed a lawsuit after they had been denied a diploma, and they protested at the Daily News after many negative editorials had already been printed. The reactive stance of the protesters means that it is hard for the Board of Trustees to change their minds without being seen as having lost and given in to the students, and allows the press to "scoop" stories about the test which lead to negative

editorials. Thus, if the students can focus the public's attention on the exit exam as the real issue to be debated, expose the covert ends of the actors who oppose them, try to win support from key actors in the case through the political process, and have proactive rather than reactive responses, then they have a greater chance of influencing language planning policy.

Conclusion

Standards based curriculums are being created throughout the world, and exit exams are being implemented in order to make sure that students meet those standards. There is a real potential that these standards will help to improve the achievement of students, but there is also a possibility that these exams will be implemented in a way that will be harmful to English language learners by denying them of a chance for further education. The exam results may also be used to threaten bilingual education. Since it is unlikely that these exit exams will be eliminated, it is important that those people who support English language learners in our schools examine how to work with government boards to influence language policy, and create appropriate means of assessment for English language learners. Those who support English language learners and bilingual education are not against standards, but should be against exit exams that do not take into account appropriate ways of measuring English language proficiency.

Bilingual students, many of them recent immigrants, should be held to high levels of achievement, but the tests used to measure that achievement must actually be designed to be valid assessments of the capabilities of English language learners. To be effective in reaching this goal, it must be realized that some people have covert agendas to be pursued through the setting of standards and the creation of exit exams. Through describing language planning cases using a framework such as Cooper's accounting framework, we can identify points of leverage that can be used to influence similar cases in the future. The debate over how to implement higher standards for the CUNY system through the use of entrance and exit exams still is continuing today. In addition, in New York City public high schools standards are also being enforced through the new use of the Regents exams as a required exam for all high school students. Thus, it is useful to closely examine cases such as the writing exit test at Hostos Community College to identify points of leverage that can be used to ensure that problems similar to those that occurred at Hostos College are avoided in similar cases in the future. From this language planning case it is clear that those who care about the future of English language learners and bilingual education must be vigilant in ensuring the appropriateness of standards and exit exams.

References

- Arce, M. (1995, December 9). Las guerras en torno a la educación bilingüe. *El Diario*, 26.

- Arenson, K. (1997, June 5). Diplomas in doubt at 3 more CUNY schools. *The New York Times*, A1.
- Arenson, K. (1997, June 24). CUNY chancellor responds to accusations on tests. *The New York Times*, B4.
- Arenson, K. (1998, May 27). CUNY to tighten admissions policy at 4-year schools. *The New York Times*, A1.
- Arenson, K. (1998, November 24). CUNY approves stiffer test intended to gauge writing ability. *The New York Times*, B7.
- Biederman, M. (1997, June 7). English is an art, not a science. *The New York Times*, 19.
- Borrero, G. (1998, June 25). Herman Badillo: de burro a elefante. *El Diario*, 3.
- Bowles, P. (1998, January 8). Hostos president quits over low test scores. *Newsday*, A28.
- Bowles, P. & Janison, D. (1998, May 27). Remedial Removal/CUNY will end programs at senior colleges. *Newsday*, A6.
- (1999). Bronx page. [Online]. Available: <http://www.cuny.edu/~bosworth> [1999, March 5].
- Bruno, stop stalling on CUNY. (1996, June 24). *Daily News (New York)*, 20.
- Buettner, R. (1997, June 2). Emotional Hostos graduation. *Daily News (New York)*, 8.
- Buettner, R. (1997, June 4). 91 Hostos students fail English test. *Daily News (New York)*, 7.
- Buettner, R. (1997, June 5). CUNY test is out at 2nd College. *Daily News (New York)*, 22.
- Buettner, R. (1997, June 6). Other colleges cut English. *Daily News (New York)*, 6.
- Buettner, R. (1997, June 6). Test regs are history lesson in confusion." *Daily News (New York)*, 6.
- Buettner, R. (1997, July 15). Judge flunks Hostos on test. *Daily News (New York)*, 6.
- Buettner, R. (1997, October 1). CUNY bigs: the write test was all wrong. *Daily News (New York)*, 4.
- Buettner, R. (1997, November 23). CCNY's fall from grace seeking new head of class for makeover of university. *Daily News (New York)*, 28.
- Castano, J. (1997, October 22). Estudiantes protestan frente al Daily News. *El Diario*, 2.
- Cooper, R. (1989). *Language planning and social change*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- CUNY reform inches along. (1998, December 11). *Daily News (New York)*, 70.
- Fanselow, J. (1991). Book review. *Teachers College Record*, 92(4), 646-650.
- Finnegan, M. & Siegel, J. (1997). Ruth: open-door CUNY Rudy hit on exam, tuition. *Daily News (New York)*, 7.
- Gonzalez, J. (1997, May 22). At CUNY, it's English as a double language. *Daily News (New York)*, 8.
- Gonzalez, J. (1997, December 29). Facts don't matter much in CUNY's quest for Hostos prez head. *Daily News (New York)*, 22.
- Gonzalez, J. (1999, June 15). CUNY study slammed Badillo's pet test. *Daily News (New York)*, 6.
- Harden, B. (1998, June 2). Reading, writing, and ruckus; city university of New York's tougher standards anger many. *The Washington Post*, A3.
- Healy, P. (1998). A conservative strategist provides ammunition for critics of SUNY and CUNY. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, A23.
- Healy, P. & Schmidt, P. (1998). In New York, a 'standards revolution' or the gutting of public colleges?; conservative trustees at SUNY and CUNY set a controversial new course for 2 mammoth systems. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, A21.
- (1999). Hostos Community College. [Online]. Available: <http://www.hostos.cuny.edu/overview> [1999, March 5].

- Hostos victory a CUNY failure. (1997, July 16). *Daily News (New York)*, 32.
- Hostos web site: www.flunk. (1997, June 5). *Daily News (New York)*, 40.
- Hot air at Hostos. (1997, June 3). *Daily News (New York)*, 30.
- In any language, Hostos flunks. (1997, August 3). *Daily News (New York)*, 58.
- Luhrs, J. (1996). Community Colleges: Placing the emphasis on 'community'. *The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education*, 7(5), 7.
- Moore, H. (1996). Language policies as virtual reality: two Australian examples. *TESOL Quarterly*, 30(3), 473-497.
- Rodriguez, R. (1997). You say tomato, I say tomate: Bilingual controversy at CUNY-Hostos revolves around final exam. *Black Issues in Higher Education*, 14(15), 10.
- Saltonstall, D. (1997). Communication problem: debate rages over minimizing English at Bronx college. *Daily News (New York)*, 43.
- Sugarman, R. (1999). Hostos prez sez turnabout is going well. *Daily News (New York)*, 3.
- Ward, M. (1998). Myths about college English as a second language. *Educational Digest*, 65.

Diana Schwinge is a doctoral student in the Educational Linguistics program at the University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests include discourse analysis, methods of second language instruction, and language planning.